



Electra, 1934

WPC-187

A figure in Greek mythology.

Builder: Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company, Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Launched: 30 June 1934

Commissioned: 25 October 1934

Decommissioned: Transferred to USN on 12 November 1935

Disposition: Returned to USCG on 21 November 1945; permanently decommissioned on 23 May 1946

Displacement: 1933: 337 tons

Dimensions:

Length: 165' oa

Beam: 25' 3"

Draft: 7' 8" (1933); 10' (1945)

Machinery: 2 x Winton Model 158 6-cylinder diesels; 1,340 bhp

Propellers: twin, 3-bladed

Performance: Maximum speed: 16.0 knots

Maximum sustained: 14.0 knots for 1,750 statute miles

Cruising: 11.0 knots for 3,000 statute miles

Economic: 6.0 knots for 6,417 statute miles

Complement: 1933: 5 officers, 39 men

Armament: 1933: 1 x 3"/23; 1 x 1-pounders;

Cost: \$242,800

Class History:

The 165-foot "B" Class cutters, sometimes referred to as the Thetis-Class, were a follow on to the 125-foot cutters. Both types of cutters were designed for the enforcement of Prohibition, but the 165-footers primary mission was to trail the mother ships that dispensed alcohol to smaller, faster vessels well beyond the territorial waters of the U.S. Hence these cutters had to have excellent sea-keeping qualities, good accommodations for the crew, and long range. Although Prohibition ended soon after most entered service, their design nevertheless proved to be adaptable to the many other missions of the Coast Guard.

An article written soon after they entered service noted that: "the new cutters are low and rakish, without excessive superstructure or freeboard. A raking stem, well flared bow and cruiser stern give the appearance of speed as well as contribute to the seaworthiness of the vessels, a quality which has been demonstrated in actual service. . . The new ships are twin-screw driven by two 670 horse power Diesel engines, furnished by the Winton Engine Co. of Cleveland, Ohio. The shafting and propellers are arranged and supported in a novel manner. The ship is equipped with two overhanging rudders on a line with and just aft of the propellers. The rudders are supported by a streamline rudder post at the forward end which is bossed out for a bearing to take a stub shaft which extends through the propeller. This method of arranging the rudders has proved remarkably successful. At full speed, the ships turn a complete circle in two minutes and eighteen seconds, and can be docked with ease under the most difficult conditions. On trial runs, the *Atalanta* averaged 16.48 knots at 468 RPM with practically no vibration and the engine under no evident strain. Due to the arduous service for which these vessels were built, only the finest materials available were used. . . It is interesting to note that genuine wrought iron pipe was used for practically all the services where resistance to corrosion, vibration, and strain was required. The fuel oil, lubricating oil, and water service to the main engines and auxiliaries; the fire and bilge system; and the steam heating system were all installed with genuine wrought iron pipe. At the Lake Union plant this pipe was furnished by the Reading Iron Company through the Crane

Company's Seattle office and Bowles Company of Seattle. The new ships are a distinct contribution to modern shipbuilding and should be of great value to the Coast Guard."*

They certainly proved to be of great value to the Coast Guard. Most saw service as coastal convoy escorts during World War II and two, the *Icarus* and the *Thetis*, each sank a U-boat. Many saw service well into the 1960s and some still service as tour boats in New York City with the Circle Tour Line, testament to their sturdy and well-thought out design.

Cutter History:

CGC *Electra* was built by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company of Manitowoc, Wisconsin and was commissioned on 25 October 1934. She was transferred to the U.S. Navy on 12 November 1935 for use as President Franklin Roosevelt's yacht. She was modified for his use, including the installation of a hand-operated elevator in her dummy rear stack, renamed USS *Potomac* (AG-25) and was commissioned on 2 March 1936 at Norfolk Navy Yard under the command of LT W. R. Jones, USN, in command.

Serving as the official yacht for President Roosevelt, AG-25 operated primarily in the Chesapeake Bay area, but made occasional cruises to Florida and the Bahamas with the President and first lady on board. She transported the President to Cape Cod where he boarded the cruiser *Augusta* for the conference with Prime Minister Churchill formulating the Atlantic Charter. In 1941, due to increased equipment added to the superstructure, the ship became top heavy and was condemned as unseaworthy. The Navy recommended that another ship be substituted but the approach of war prevented such action, however, the President ordered the ship not to operate in open waters. Replaced by *Williamsburg*, and decommissioned on 15 November 1945, *Potomac* was returned to the Coast Guard 23 November, and struck from the Navy List 25 February 1946.

She was transferred to the State of Maryland later in 1946, and served with the Tidewaters Fisheries Commission until sold to Warren G. Toone in April 1960 and placed in service as a ferry boat between San Juan, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. She was subsequently purchased by the Hydro Capital Company, refurbished, and used as a traveling historical museum of the Franklin D. Roosevelt era. In January 1964 she was purchased by Elvis Presley and given to St. Jade's Hospital, Memphis, Tennessee.

She eventually ended up in San Francisco where she was seized in 1980 by the U.S. Customs for her role as a front for drug smugglers. Towed to Treasure Island, she sank at her berth. The Navy re-floated her two weeks later, she was sold to the Port of Oakland for just \$15,000. The Port of Oakland spearheaded a cooperative effort with organized labor, maritime corporations and dedicated volunteers to complete a \$5 million restoration. She has, since 1995, been open to the public. She is under the care and operation of the Association for the Preservation of the Presidential Yacht *Potomac*, which now operates this National Historic Landmark as an active memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the momentous times through which he led our nation.

For further information, see: www.usspotomac.org

Sources:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

Donald Canney. *U.S. Coast Guard & Revenue Cutters, 1790 - 1935*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

Robert Scheina. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982.